

HOW LITTLE WE KNOW.

How little we know of each other,
As we pass through the journey of life,
With its struggles, its fears and temptations,
Its heart-breaking cares and its strife!
We can only see things on the surface,
For few people glory in sin,
And an unruffled face is no index
To the tumult which rages within.

How little we know of each other!
The man who to day passes by,
Blest with fortune, and honor and titles,
And holding his proud head on high,
May carry a dread secret within him
Which makes in his bosom a hell,
And he, sooner or later, a felon,
May writhe in the prisoner's cell.

How little we know of each other!
That woman of fashion, who sneers
At the poor girl betrayed and abandoned,
And left to her sighs and her tears,
May, ere the sun rises to-morrow,
Have the mask rudely torn from her face,
And sink from the height of her glory
To the dark shades of shame and disgrace.

How little we know of each other!
Of ourselves too little we know;
We are all weak when under temptation,
All subject to error and woe;
Then let blessed charity rule us,
Let us put away envy and spite—
For the skeleton grim in our closet
May some day be brought to the light.

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BY

ELDER ORSON PRATT

In the New Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Sunday Afternoon, Nov. 12, 1876.

REPORTED BY GEO. F. GIBBS.

I AM pleased to see so large a company assembled together, notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather; it shows to me that there is an interest in the minds of the Latter-day Saints in regard to their future salvation. We, as a people, have passed through many scenes trying and afflicting to our natures, which we have endured because of the anxiety of our hearts to obtain salvation. People who are sincere will manifest their sincerity in undergoing great tribulation, if necessary, for the sake of being saved. This mortal life is of small consideration, compared with eternal salvation in the kingdom of the Father. There is nothing pertaining to the things of this present life that is worthy of being named, in contrast with the riches of eternal life. Jesus, in speaking upon this subject when he was on the earth, asks this question: "For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" There is nothing so precious, nothing of so great importance, as that of securing, in this life, the salvation of our souls in the world to come. Far better is it if we can gain salvation by passing through various scenes of affliction and persecution in this world, than to give way to its pleasures and vanities, which can only be enjoyed for a season, and afterwards lose that eternal reward which God has in store for the righteous.

It is true we look upon our future reward in quite a different light from the religious world generally. We look for something tangible, something we can form some degree of rational conception of, having a resemblance in some measure to the present life. But how very imaginary are the ideas of the religious world! I do not now refer to the heathen world, but to the enlightened Christian nations, the two hundred million of Christians now existing on the earth. If you ask these people about the future state of man, some will give you one idea and some another, all more or less, perhaps, differing from each other, but in the main they all agree, namely, that it is a state entirely spiritual, that is, unconnected with anything tangible like this present life, an existence which cannot be conceived of by mortals.

You may think I am misrepresenting our Christian friends. I will therefore say that for many years now I have been engaged, more or less, in the study of religion, and have therefore read quite extensively the ideas of the religious world. I have not accepted the ideas of a few individuals belonging to the various sects, but I

have appealed to their standard writings, their articles of faith, which are adopted by the various religious bodies and known as their creeds. For instance, in the articles of faith of a great many of the religious sects, an idea like this is set forth—that there is a Being who is entirely spiritual, called God, and that Being is described as consisting of three persons, and these three persons are without body, without parts and without passions. Such is the God that is worshipped by the Methodists—a people whom I highly respect, and whose meetings I attended in my early youth more than those of any other religious denomination. The three persons that compose this one God are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, all of whom are said to be without bodies or passions; and in connection with this, one of the cardinal doctrines of their faith, they tell us that one of this holy Trinity, namely Jesus, was crucified, dead and buried, and that on the third day he arose again from the dead and ascended into heaven.

When I was a boy, attending the Methodist meetings, I, as many now do who are of maturer years, accepted sincerity for truth. But when I grew to manhood my attention was called to this article of faith; I tried in all earnestness to comprehend it, but could not, and cannot to this day. It is one of those incomprehensible things which cannot be grasped by the human mind. You, my hearers, try now with me for a few moments to comprehend, if you can, a being consisting of three persons, and those three persons without any body, parts or passions. I had been taught, when studying the exact sciences, that every thing that existed was composed of parts, that there could not exist anything as a whole unless it existed as parts. I could not, therefore, understand how it was that one of these three persons could be crucified if he had no body; how it was possible and be consistent with reason, for him to lay down his body—something he never possessed—and arise again from the tomb, taking up that same body. This is indeed a mystery!

Now it so happens that the Scriptures do not teach anything so absurd, so irreconcilable and so contrary to our senses. This is a man-made doctrine, the creation of uninspired men. The Methodists did not originate this doctrine, it existed and was widely believed in before the days of the good man, John Wesley.

The Latter-day Saints believe that there is a true and living God, that this true and living God consists of three separate, distinct persons, which have bodies, parts, and passions, which belief is in direct opposition to this man-made doctrine. We believe that God, the Eternal Father, who reigns in yonder heavens, is a distinct personage from Jesus Christ, as much so as an earthly father is distinct in his existence from his son. That is something I can comprehend, which I conceive to be the doctrine of revelation. We read about Jesus having been seen, after he arose from the dead. Stephen the Martyr, just before he was stoned to death, testified to the Jewish people that were standing before him at the time, saying "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." Here, then, the Father and Jesus, two distinct personages, were seen, and both had bodies. We find numerous other authorities bearing out this same idea. I do not intend to dwell upon this subject, because the greater portion of this congregation understand the scriptural view of this subject; hence it is not necessary to speak lengthily on it. We may, however, say a few things with regard to the passions of these personages.

It is declared, as part of the belief of the Methodists, that God is without passions. Love is one of the great passions of God. Love is everywhere declared a passion, one of the noblest passions of the human heart. This principle of love is one of the attributes of God. "God is love," says the Apostle John, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." If, then, this is one of the great attributes of Jehovah, if he is filled with love and compassion towards the children of men, if his son Jesus Christ so loved the world that he gave his life to redeem mankind from the effects of the fall, then, certainly, God the Eternal Father must be in possession of

this passion. Again, he possesses the attribute of Justice, which is sometimes called Anger, but the real name of this attribute is Justice. "He executeth justice," says the Psalmist; also, "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne." Justice is one of the noble characteristics of our heavenly Father; hence another of his passions.

We have it recorded, too in this sacred Bible, that God was seen by ancient men of God. Jacob testifies as follows: "for I have seen God face to face." I know that there are other passages of Scripture, which would seem to militate against this declaration. For instance, there is one passage which reads, "No man hath seen God at any time." This is in direct contradistinction to the testimony of Jacob. The way I reconcile this is that no natural man can see the face of God the Father and live, it would overpower him; but one quickened by the spirit, as old father Jacob was, could look upon God, and converse with him face to face, as one man would with another. If Jacob did really see God face to face, as he says he did, he must have seen a personage, a being, in his general outlines like unto himself; man, as Moses informs us, having been created in the image of God.

We might refer to many other passages of Scripture, bearing on this subject. The prophet Isaiah saw God; he saw not only the Lord, but a great congregation in connection with him, so that his train filled the temple. He is always represented by those who have seen him as a personage in the form of man.

Having cited a very few evidences, let us inquire into the character and being of God, the Eternal Father. We are the offspring of the Lord, but the rest of animated nature is not; we are just as much the sons and daughters of God as the children in this congregation are the sons and daughters of their parents. We were begotten by him. When? Before we were born in the flesh; this limited state of existence is not our origin, it is merely the origin of the tabernacle in which we dwell. The mind we are possessed of, that being that is capable of thinking and reflecting, that is capable of acting according to the motives presented to it, that being which is immortal, which dwells within us, which is capable of reasoning from cause to effect, and which can comprehend, in some measure, the laws of its Creator, as well as trace them out as exhibited in universal nature, that being, which we call the Mind, existed before the tabernacle.

But says one, "That does not look reasonable." Why not? Do you not believe that the Spirit will endure forever? O, yes. You may ask, what becomes of the spirit, separated from the body of flesh and bones, when this body lies in the grave? Has it life and intelligence and power to think and reflect? Let us hear what was said by those who sat under the altar, who were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held, as seen and heard by John while on Patmos. "And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? The Lord tells them that they should "rest yet for a little season." These faithful servants of God are anxiously awaiting the time when the Lord will avenge their blood? Why? Because that will be the time when their bodies will be redeemed, they look forward with great anxiety to the time when they shall be again identified with the fleshly tabernacle with which they were known and distinguished while on the earth, hence this prayer.

Here we find another and further existence for the spirits of men who exist in heaven, who are capable of thinking, of using language, of understanding the future, and of anticipating that which was to come. Now, if they could exist after they leave this tabernacle, while the tabernacle lies mouldering in the dust, why not exist before the tabernacle had any existence? Was it not just as easy for an existence to be given to spiritual personages before they took possession of bodies as it is for them to exist after the body decays? Yes, and these are our views, founded upon new revelation; not the views of uninspired men, but founded upon direct revelation from God.

Where did we exist before we

came here? With God. Where does he exist? In the place John designated heaven. What do we understand heaven to be? Not the place described by our Christian friends, beyond the bounds of time and space, for there is no such place, there never was, nor ever will be; but I mean a tangible world, a heaven that is perfect, a heaven with materials that have been organized and put together, sanctified and glorified as the residence and world where God resides. Born there? Yes, we were born there. Even our great Redeemer, whose death and sufferings we are this afternoon celebrating, was born up in yonder world before he was born of the Virgin Mary. Have you not read, in the New Testament, that Jesus Christ was the first-born of every creature? From this reading it would seem that he was the oldest of the whole human family, that is, so far as his birth in the spirit world is concerned. How long ago since that birth took place is not revealed; it might have been unnumbered millions of years for aught we know. But we do know that he was born and was the oldest of the family of spirits. Have you not also read in the New Testament that he is called our Elder Brother? Does this refer to the birth of the body of flesh and bones? By no means, for there were hundreds of millions who were born upon our earth before the body of flesh and bones was born whom we call Jesus. How is it, then, that he is our Elder Brother? We must go back to the previous birth, before the foundation of this earth; we have to go back to past ages, to the period when he was begotten of the Father among the great family of spirits. He became, by his birthright, the great Creator. God, through him, created not only this little world, this spec of creation, but by him the worlds were made and created. How many we know not, for it has not been revealed. Suffice it to say, a great many worlds were created by him. Why by him? Because he had the birthright, he being the oldest of his father's family, and this birthright entitles him, not only to create worlds, but to become the redeemer of those worlds; not only the redeemer of the inhabitants of this our earth, but of all the others whom he created by the will and power of his Father.

But says one, "By that expression one would infer that other worlds have fallen as well as our own, having doubtless been placed in a state of temptation, and if so it would be fair to presume that there was a Garden of Eden to each of these worlds, containing all kinds of fruit, among which was the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, and that they became fallen precisely in the same manner as ours did, and consequently they would need a redeemer; and, therefore, the people of these worlds would be redeemed and saved according to their diligence and faithfulness in keeping the commandments of God?" Have you not read in the first chapter of Genesis of two persons appearing on this earth before man was made, when one who was God said to the other, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness?" Does not that bespeak a pre-existence of another personage besides the Almighty? And have you not read too in the same chapter that "God created man in his own image; male and female created he them?" When? It is said to have been on the sixth period, or, according to King James' translation, "on the sixth day." Do you mean to say we were all in existence on the sixth day? Yes. But on the seventh day, we are told in the following chapter, "there was not a man to till the ground." Is it not very singular that all should have an existence on the sixth day and on the following day there was not a man in existence to till the ground? Why not? Because man was not yet placed in this temporal creation, but he had an existence then in heaven, where we were begotten. You and I were present when this world was created and made, you and I then understood the nature of its creation, and I have no doubt that we rejoiced and sang about it. Indeed, the Lord put a very curious question to the Patriarch Job apropos of this. He said to him, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundation of the earth?" Where wast thou "when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"

Supposing Job to be living now, and this same question put to him, and supposing too that, instead of

answering it himself, he were to seek to the learned Christian world for enlightenment on the subject, what do you think would be the nature of the answer he would receive? It would be, in effect, "Why, Job, when the Lord laid the foundation of the earth, you had no existence, for you were not born." Why did not Job so answer the Lord? It was because he understood something about man's previous estate. He was wise in making no reply to the Lord, for doubtless he felt himself unable to do so. But we find that Moses understood the subject, for at the time the children of Israel transgressed he and his brother Aaron fell upon their faces before the Lord, and Moses, pleading with great power and faith in behalf of the children of Israel, used these words, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh," etc. He understood that God was the Father of our spirits, and he addressed him as such. I think too that the apostles in ancient days must have had an idea of the pre-existence of man, judging from a certain question which they put to the Saviour. It is said that "as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Let us now consider this question in connection with present modern ideas, and we shall at once perceive how utterly foolish it will appear. To state the question fairly in other words we might say, Master, was this man born blind because he had sinned? The very nature of this question would indicate, to those even who do not believe in the principle, that this blind man had an existence before he was born into this world, and that he was capable, too, of committing sin. To show yet more clearly that the principle of man's pre-existence is founded on biblical authority, I will quote you part of the Saviour's prayer to the Father, just prior to his crucifixion—"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Here we find Jesus actually referring to the time he dwelt with his Father before he took upon himself a body of flesh and bones. He also says, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." He came down from the presence and abode of his Father. On another occasion, while addressing the Jews, he says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am." He was, in fine, the first-born of every creature, and consequently the eldest of our Father's family.

If, therefore, it be now admitted that our Elder Brother had a previous existence with the Father, why should it be thought unreasonable that the rest of the family should have a pre-existence as well as the First Born? He was born according to man in the flesh, and why not his younger brethren have a similar birth with him in the spirit?

But now this carries us back still further, and invites us to ascertain a little in relation to his Father. A great many have supposed that God the Eternal Father, whom we worship in connection with his Son, Jesus Christ, was always a self-existing, eternal being from all eternity, that he had no beginning as a personage. But in order to illustrate this let us inquire, What is our destiny? If we are now the sons and daughters of God, what will be our future destiny? The Apostle Paul, in speaking of man as a resurrected being, says, "Who (Jesus) shall change our vile body, that it might be fashioned like unto his glorious body," which harmonizes with what John says, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him." Our bodies will be glorified in the same manner as his body is; then we shall be truly in his image and likeness, for as he is immortal, having a body of flesh and bone, so we will be immortal, possessing bodies of flesh and bones. Will we ever become Gods? Let me refer you to the answer of the Saviour to the Jews when accused of blasphemy because he called himself the Son of God. Save he, "Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If ye called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scriptures cannot be broken." This clearly proves to all Bible believers that in this world, in our imperfect state, being the children of God, we are destined, if we keep his commandments, to grow in intelligence until we finally become like God our Father. By living according to every word which proceeds from the mouth of God, we shall attain to his likeness, the same as our children grow up and become like their parents; and, as children through diligence attain to the wisdom and knowledge of their parents, so may we attain to the knowledge of our Heavenly Parents, and if they be obedient to this commandment they will not only be called the sons of God, but be gods.